

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 08153 01 OF 03 072126Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8283
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AMEMBASSY LISBON
USNMR SHAPE
USMISSION USNATO
USCINCEUR
DIA WASHDC
USMISSION USUN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 08153
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 08153 01 OF 03 072126Z

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: 1978 ELECTIONS: A VIEW FROM THE NORTH

SUMMARY. A FIVE-DAY TRIP TO THE TWO MOST POPULOUS DEPARTMENTS, AFTER THE PARIS REGION, INCLUDING TALKS WITH A DOZEN CANDIDATES IN THE MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION, LEAVES SOME CLEAR IMPRESSIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE LOCAL FEDERATIONS ON THEIR NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND A LESS CLEAR IDEA OF THE LOCAL SITUATION IN THE REGION. THE PS-PCF FEUD RAGES IN THE NORTH LIKE NOWHERE ELSE IN FRANCE. BUT, CURIOUSLY, DESISTEMENT OR SUPPORT IN THE SECOND ROUND IS NOT A BIG PROBLEM. THE REASON IS THAT THE LEFT OFTEN SCORES BETWEEN 60 AND 80 PERCENT OF THE FIRST ROUND SCORE, LEAVING LITTLE CHANCE FOR THE MAJORITY CANDIDATE TO SNEAK BY IN A SECOND-ROUND TRIANGULAR RACE. ONE WOULD EXPECT PS-PCF RELATIONS IN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCILS SINCE LAST MARCH TO BE AN ISSUE AND A FACTOR IN THE LEFT VOTE, ESPECIALLY ON THE SECOND ROUND. BUT THIS IS FAR FROM SURE. MAJORITY CANDIDATES ARE CERTAINLY HITTING THIS THEME, ESPECIALLY WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN PROBLEMS, BUT THE LEFT DENIES ANY SPECIAL TROUBLE AND PLAYS DOWN THE WHOLE QUESTION. FRANCOIS MITTERRAND MADE A HURRICANE SWING THROUGH THE REGION AND TALKED CONFIDENTLY ABOUT THE HISTORICAL WAVE OF FRENCH SOCIALISM WHICH IS ROLLING BACK "20 YEARS OF CONSERVATISM AND INERTIA." AND WHILE HE STRUCK A CONCORDANT NOTE IN THIS PREDOMINANTLY WORKER REGION, NEITHER THE PCF, WHICH IS AS WELL ENTRENCHED AS THE PS, NOR THE RPR, WHICH HAS SEEN MORE GLORIOUS DAYS IN THE NORTH BUT STILL REMAINS THE MAIN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 08153 01 OF 03 072126Z

PARTY OF THE MAJORITY, HAS BEEN WILLING TO GIVE AN INCH. NEVERTHELESS, THE PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS (15 PS, 12 PCF AND 10 MAJORITY) WILL PROBABLY CHANGE SLIGHTLY TO THE SOCIALISTS' ADVANTAGE. END SUMMARY.

1. SOCIALIST STRATEGY: THE IMPORTANCE OF A FEDERATION, IN A PARTY WHICH ESPOUSES INTERNAL DEMOCRACY AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AT ALL LEVELS, IS THAT IT IS AS MUCH A DECISION MAKER AS AN EXECUTOR OF NATIONAL DECISIONS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY THE CASE FOR THE TWO LARGEST SOCIALIST PARTY FEDERATIONS IN THE COUNTRY, THE NORD AND PAS-DE-CALAIS. THEIR ATTITUDE ON A NUMBER OF CURRENT ISSUES IS LIKELY TO BE INFLUENCED AS MUCH BY HISTORICAL FACTORS OF THE REGION AS BY THE MERITS OF THE QUESTION. THESE FACTORS INCLUDE A RUTHLESS 50-YEAR RIVALRY WITH THE PCF FOR DOMINANCE IN THIS WORKER AREA AND A TRADITION OF TOUGHNESS IN POLITICS BY MILITANTS AND PARTY MEMBERS WHO LEARNED THEIR TRADE IN THE COAL MINES AND STEEL MILLS.

2. THE TRANSLATION OF THESE FACTORS INTO CURRENT POSI-

TIONS HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN EASY. THE MAIN CURRENT OF
OPINION IS DECIDEDLY PRO-UNION WITH THE PCF AND WILL RE-
MAIN SO AT LEAST AS LONG AS THIS STRATEGY PROVES SO AD-
VANTAGEOUS TO THE PS. PRO-UNION IN THE NORTHERN CONTEXT,
AND INCREASINGLY SO AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, MEANS DESTROY-
ING THE REAL POWER OF THE PCF BY FORCING IT TO STAY IN
THE COMMON PROGRAM. IT MEANS COMPETING WITH COMMUNIST
CANDIDATES WHERE THE PCF IS STRONG, ORGANIZING IN FAC-
TORIES WHERE THE CGT RULES AND STICKING DOGGEDLY TO THE
SOCIALIST INTERPRETATION OF THE COMMON PROGRAM. IN THE

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PAGE 01 PARIS 08153 02 OF 03 072234Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 PM-05
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 PARIS 08153
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 08153 02 OF 03 072234Z

WORDS OF JACQUES MELICK, A FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE YOUNG SOCIALISTS AND CANDIDATE IN BETHUNE, "WE COULDN'T MATCH THE COMMUNISTS OUTSIDE A UNION OF THE LEFT, SO NOW OUR STRATEGY IS TO DESTROY THEM IN AND THROUGH THE UNION." DESTROYING THE PCF MEANS REDUCING IT TO ABOUT 15 PERCENT, A LEVEL WHERE IT FAILS TO BE A NATIONAL PARTY. AND HOW TO DO THIS? MELICK AND OTHERS ANSWER: BY ENSURING THE PS STAYS GENUINELY LEFT, LEAVING THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE FOR THE PCF THE UNATTRACTIVE ONE OF A MARGINAL PARTY OUTSIDE THE UNION.

3. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT, GIVEN THIS FIERCELY COMBATIVE SPIRIT BY NORTHERN SOCIALISTS, THE FEDERATIONS HAVE TAKEN OR WILL TAKE THE FOLLOWING HARD-LINE POSITIONS. ANY HINT OF COMPROMISES WHICH WATER DOWN THE CURRENT PS LINE EVOKES THREATS OF AN INTERNAL PS CRISIS AND EVENTUAL DESERTION:

- NO EXCEPTIONS TO THE DESISTEMENT RULE: THE WINNER OF THE PS/PC/MRG FIRST-ROUND PRIMARY RUNS ON THE SECOND ROUND. NO DEALS FOR INCUMBENT PCF DEPUTIES WHO LOSE THE PRIMARY TO THE PS CANDIDATE, AS A RESULT OF A NEGOTIATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL TO WIN FCF SUPPORT ON THE SECOND ROUND.
- ONCE IN GOVERNMENT, NO BACKSLIDING ON THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS ON WHICH PS CANDIDATES RAN, EITHER WITH RESPECT TO CONTENT OR SCHEDULE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.
- NO DEALS WITH THE CENTER, UNLESS OF COURSE CENTRISTS WISH TO SUPPORT THE LEFT PROGRAM AND IN EFFECT BECOME SOCIALISTS.
- A TOTAL COMMITMENT TO FORM A GOVERNMENT WITH

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 08153 02 OF 03 072234Z

THE PCF. IF THIS POSSIBILITY DOES NOT MATERIALIZE, IT WILL BE DUE TO THE PCF'S REFUSAL; BUT THE PS IS ENSURING THAT THE DOOR REMAIN

OPEN TO A PCF ACCEPTANCE.

-- A NORTHERN VARIATION TO THIS INSISTENCE ON A PS/PC/MRG GOVERNMENT IS THE MAUROY (MAYOR OF LILLE AND NUMBER TWO IN THE PS) LINE ADVOCATING CERTAIN GESTURES AND CONCESSIONS TOWARD THE PCF, INCLUDING A MINIMUM WAGE OF 2,400 FRANCS, SOMETHING ON NATIONALIZATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PCF BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. ACCORDING TO HIS CONFIDANTS, MAUROY WAS AND PRESUMABLY STILL IS CONCERNED OVER THE PROSPECTS OF TRYING TO GOVERN AS A MINORITY, WITHOUT PCF PARTICIPATION. MAUROY, LIKE THE OTHER SOCIALISTS IN HIS REGION, ENDS UP FAVORING PC PARTICIPATION; THE DIFFERENCE WITH HIS SOCIALIST COLLEAGUES IS ONLY ONE OF TACTICS.

4. FRANCOIS MITTERRAND VISITS THE NORTH: SOCIALIST DETERMINATION WAS ECHOED AND REINFORCED BY PS FIRST SECRETARY MITTERRAND, WHO HELD FOUR LARGE RALLIES AND TWO PRESS CONFERENCES IN THE TWO DEPARTMENTS IN ONE DAY. MITTERRAND WAS TALKING TO THE CONVINCED FOR THE MOST PART, MILITANTS WHO WERE MOBILIZED TO GIVE A SHOW OF STRENGTH FOR THEIR LEADER RATHER THAN THE CURIOUS OBSERVER WHO HAS NOT ALREADY DECIDED HIS VOTE. THE OUTSIDE OBSERVER CAN QUESTION THE SINCERITY OF MITTERRAND'S REMARKS; HIS AUDIENCES DO NOT. THEIR SPONTANEOUS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE MAN WHOM THEY CONSIDER RESPONSIBLE FOR TRIPLING THE PARTY'S ELECTORATE IN SEVEN YEARS WAS ONLY PARTLY ABETTED BY MITTERRAND'S IMPERSONAL, DETACHED DELIVERY AND SEMI-PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES. ASIDE FROM PROGRAMMATIC APPEALS, ATTACKS ON THE GOF AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE PCF, HIS SPEECHES EMPHASIZED THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE PARTY, ITS RECENT GROWTH AND ITS FUTURE.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PARIS 08153 02 OF 03 072234Z

LITTLE DOES IT MATTER, HE SAID, WHETHER HE BECOMES PRIME MINISTER OR WHETHER HIS GENERATION TAKES OVER THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY AND FRENCH SOCIALISM, THAT THE PARTY INCREASES ITS NUMBER OF DEPUTIES AND THAT THE LEFT CREATE THE INDELIBLE FACT OF A MAJORITY PRESENCE. THIS IS THE REASON WHY THE PS HAS SET SEVEN MILLION VOTES AS ITS MINIMUM GOAL ON THE FIRST ROUND; THIS FIGURE PLUS THE ESTIMATED PCF VOTE SHOULD CONSTITUTE A POPULAR MAJORITY. NOBODY UNDER THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION CAN TELL THE PRESIDENT WHOM TO CHOOSE AS PRIME MINISTER, BUT THE LEFT, MITTERRAND CONTINUED, CAN CREATE CONDITIONS WHICH LEAVE GISCARD ONLY ONE WORKABLE CHOICE. IF THE LEFT WINS, MITTERRAND PROMISED, THE PS WILL IMPLEMENT THE COMMON PROGRAM, "THE WHOLE COMMON PROGRAM", HE REPEATED, IN CASE THERE WAS

ANY DOUBT ABOUT HIS INTENTIONS. IF THE LEFT LOST OR THE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 08153 03 OF 03 072144Z
ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 08153
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 08153 03 OF 03 072144Z

FCF MADE GOVERNMENT IMPOSSIBLE, THE PS WOULD REMAIN THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WOULD PLAY OUT ITS ROLE IN THE LOYAL OPPOSITION UNTIL THE DAY (NOT TOO FAR OFF, HE HINTED) WHEN IT WOULD HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE BEFORE THE ELECTORATE.

5. PCF STRENGTH TOO: THE PCF HAS NEVER REACTED FROM A POSITION OF WEAKNESS IN THE NORTH, AND IT IS NOT ABOUT TO START NOW JUST BECAUSE THE PS HAS MADE CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS. THE PCF HAS POCKETS OF STRENGTH WHERE IT IS PRACTICALLY INVINCIBLE, A PRESENCE ELSEWHERE WHERE IT CAN MENACE PS AND MAJORITY STRONG-HOLDS AND ABOUT 25,000 MILITANTS AS EVIDENCE OF ITS INTENTIONS. PRACTICALLY ITS ENTIRE EFFORT BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND IS DIRECTED AGAINST THE PS -- MAJORITY CANDIDATES ARE ONLY AN AFTERTHOUGHT. IN MANY CASES, THE WINNER OF THE LEFT PRIMARY IS AN AUTOMATIC WINNER IN THE FINAL ROUND, GIVEN UP TO AN 80 PERCENT LEFT VOTE. THE PCF HOLDS 12 SEATS FROM THE TWO DEPARTMENTS AND IS EXPECTED TO HOLD ON TO ALL BUT TWO, EVEN WITH STRONG PS CHALLENGES. IT ALSO HAS A CHANCE OF WINNING TWO OTHERS, NOW HELD BY THE PS AND RPR. IN GENERAL, PCF STRENGTH IS HOLDING STEADY, ABOUT AS WELL AS IT IS DOING NATIONALLY. IT SEEMED HEADED FOR A SLOW, STEADY DECLINE A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, BUT HARD WORK AT THE GRASS ROOTS AND AID FROM THE NATIONAL OFFICE HAVE THWARTED THIS TREND. IT IS ASSUMED BY PCF WATCHERS IN THE NORTH THAT THE NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS WILL NEVER ALLOW THIS VITAL WORKER REGION TO DECLINE FOR LACK OF FINANCIAL OR PERSONNEL RESOURCES. NEVERTHELESS, IT WAS THE GENERAL OPINION OF OUTSIDERS THAT THE PCF CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT HANDICAPPED BY THE RECENT ZIGZAGS OF GEORGES MARCHAIS' ATTACKS ON THE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 08153 03 OF 03 072144Z

PS. THEY HAVE APPARENTLY DISORIENTED THE PCF ELECTORATE AND PROVED UNCONVINCING TO THE NON-COMMITTED.

6. THE MAJORITY (RPR) FIGHTS THE GOOD FIGHT: HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED AND OUT-ORGANIZED BY THE LEFT, THE MAJORITY NONETHELESS HAS TEN DEPUTIES WHICH HE IS TRYING DESPERATELY TO HOLD ON TO. EIGHT ARE RPR, WHICH WITH ABOUT 8,000 MILITANTS IN THE TWO DEPARTMENTS IS THE ONLY MAJORITY PARTY WORTHY OF ITS NAME. THE OTHER PARTIES, INCLUDING THE RECENT AMALGAM, UNION FOR FRENCH DEMOCRACY (UDF), ARE KNOWN ONLY BECAUSE A NATIONAL FI-

GURE SUCH AS CDS LEADER ANDRE DILIGENT HAS PICKED A DISTRICT IN THE NORTH TO RUN. THE RPR, WHICH FELL INTO A SEVEN-YEAR SOPORIFIC SLUMP AFTER ITS SUCCESSES IN 1968, STARTED REORGANIZING AFTER JACQUES CHIRAC'S CLARION CALL IN DECEMBER 1975. BUT IT WAS ONLY 6 MONTHS AGO THAT THE FEDERATIONS ORGANIZED THEMSELVES TO PREPARE FOR THE LEGISLATIVES. SINCE THEN, IT HAS FOUND CANDIDATES, USUALLY YOUNG, TO RUN IN PRACTICALLY EVERY ONE OF THE 27 DISTRICTS. IT IS CONFIDENT OF RETURNING FIVE OF ITS DEPUTIES, HOPEFUL TO RETURN THE OTHER THREE AND SEES AN OUTSIDE CHANCE TO WIN TWO NEW SEATS. IT AIMS ITS CAMPAIGN AT THE WORKERS AND OTHER POPULAR CLASSES, CLAIMS IT IS PRESENT IN THE FACTORIES, AND PLAYS ON PS-PC DIFFERENCES BY OFFERING ITSELF TO THE ELECTORATE AS THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO THE LEFT. IT COUNTS ON PS-PC COMPETITION IN THE FIRST ROUND AND THE NATIONAL POLEMIC HURTING LEFT DISCIPLINE ENOUGH THAT THE RPR CANDIDATE WILL WIN A PLURALITY IN THE RUN-OFF IN CLOSE RACES. BUT RPR SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS MUST BE CONSIDERED MODEST. IT IS OPERATING IN A HOSTILE COUNTRY, IT GOT STARTED TOO LATE AND IT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONVINCE ITS OLDER DEPUTIES TO LEAVE THEIR PLACE FOR YOUNGER POLITICIANS. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR LABOR JACQUES LEGENDRE, WHO WON BOTH HIS ASSEMBLY SEAT AND HIS CITY HALL FROM A SOCIALIST, SAYS HE IS FORCED TO RUN AS HARD THIS TIME AS IN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PARIS 08153 03 OF 03 072144Z

HIS FIRST RACE -- AND AGAINST A PS CANDIDATE WHO WAS SENT OUT FROM PARIS WITH NO ROOTS IN THE AREA. THE DYNAMIC RPR FEDERATION HEAD, ECHOING AN OCCASIONAL CHIRAC THEME, SUMMED UP THE RPR STRATEGY AS TRYING TO HANG ON TO WHAT THEY HAVE, AT THE SAME TIME FIELDING AS MANY YOUNG CANDIDATES AS POSSIBLE SO THAT THEY WILL HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE FOR THE NEXT ELECTIONS, SHOULD THE LEFT WIN THIS TIME.
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